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“Radish, One per Night” *Early Godots in the Regional Theatre Archive*

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Abstract

This essay considers the construction and reception of *Waiting for Godot* in British regional repertory theatre between 1956 and the early 1970s, arguing that the disruptive potential of the play, as registered by the London reviewers, was recontextualised, and for some time largely contained, by the framing of the play within the repertory system and its associated discourses.

Résumé

Cet essai étudie l'interprétation et l'accueil d'*En attendant Godot* dans le théâtre de répertoire régional en Grande Bretagne entre 1956 et le début des années 1970. L'article avance l'hypothèse que le potentiel novateur de la pièce, bien repéré par les critiques londoniens, a été recontextualisé et, pendant quelque temps, largement contenu par l'encadrement de la pièce au sein du système de théâtre de répertoire et des discours qui lui sont associés.

Keywords

performance – reception – regional repertory – theatrical ephemera – repertory programming

At the 2014 conference “Staging Beckett at the Margins” at the University of Chester, a certain hierarchy of the marginal emerged from the programme, which had invited papers considering perceived notions of “Beckett at the margins, on productions staged outside London and other major theatrical cen-

tres."¹ Considerably more papers were devoted to geographically distant productions of Beckett plays in places such as Singapore, India, post-communist Romania, Nicosia, Israel, post-Katrina New Orleans and Hollywood than to British productions of Beckett plays staged outside of London since the original Peter Hall *Godot* in 1955. Those papers that did deal with British Beckett productions outside of London, amateur and professional, tended to concentrate on contemporary work.

At this time, I had recently begun to research Beckett productions in the midlands before 1968 as part of a Beckett strand of the Theatre Archive Project's oral history of post-war British theatre.² In the archives of regional theatre companies, chiefly deposited not at universities but at county council archive offices, combing through promptbooks, theatrical ephemera, programmes, playbills, cashbooks, press releases and contracts, I was encountering for the first time *Waiting for Godot* in the context of provincial repertory theatre of the 1950s and 60s. Suddenly, strangely, *Godot* was less a famously inscrutable high modernist artefact than a single licensed theatrical property amongst others, no longer in a metropolitan theatre but billed for a fortnight of a repertory season, moving gradually from avant-garde 'new play' to 'modern classic,' as subject to the variations of time and place as any other object.

It seemed to me that there was an argument to be made that an analysis of what could be recuperated archivally concerning regional English productions of *Godot* between the London premiere and the aftermath of Beckett's Nobel Prize constituted in certain ways as much a genuine engagement with "Beckett at the margins" as Susan Sontag's 1993 Sarajevo *Godot* or the Classical Theatre of Harlem's 2007 *Godot* in a storm-wrecked New Orleans, both of which have generated far more critical attention and both of which are, arguably, central to the familiar canon of Beckettian performance histories. Considering the play in terms of how it was inserted into regional theatre after its West End run, on the other hand, involves a specific cultural politics of location, an 'alternative' production history in the specific context of post-war regional repertory and its associated cultural, civic and economic discourses, and, finally, a consideration of what might be termed a 'domestication' or containment of a radical play within the inherently conservative conventions of the repertory system. If, as David Bradby suggests, *Godot* has always functioned as a litmus test of the

1 Call for papers for "Staging Beckett at the Margins," University of Chester, 11–12th September 2014. <http://www.chester.ac.uk/staging-beckett>. Accessed 22/10/2015.

2 Theatre Archive Project is an AHRC-funded collaboration between De Montfort University and the British Library, investigating British theatre history from 1945–1968. <http://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/Theatre-Archive-Project>. Accessed 19/10/2015.

places in which it is produced (1), then its early production history in the provinces offers a series of snapshots of what Baz Kershaw calls an 'ecology,' "a continuous flux of interdependencies between [...] theatres and companies, economics and aesthetics, state institutions and artists" (2004, 293). Located analyses of these early *Godots* produce significantly different readings to the early formalist/humanist critical approaches.

Despite the discourse of the marginal and the residual, of repetition and circularity in Beckett's work, we do not easily think of Beckett as a writer whose iconic play might be viewed as a natural fit between a run of *Charley's Aunt* and the Christmas pantomime. This, however, is how it is overwhelmingly documented in the ephemera and press-cuttings from local newspapers held in the archives of regional repertories. Not only was the Nottingham Playhouse's critically acclaimed 1957 *Godot* incongruously scheduled for a week in a notably 'light' summer season (along with a recently-filmed Broadway comedy success, John Patrick's *Teahouse of the August Moon*, and Peter Ustinov's diplomatic satire *Romanoff and Juliet*), it was also matter-of-factly listed in a local paper's 'Round the Theatres' piece along with the other local theatrical entertainments with which it was competing for declining audiences: *The Striptease Murders*—the competing drama from the city's other resident company, the twice-nightly repertory Court Players—and a 'glamour girl' production at the Nottingham Empire which was faintly praised as having some inoffensive routines.³ How does this loss of the aura of the singular, austere modernist work of art alter its 1957 audiences' reception of the play? As Ric Knowles argues, theatrical productions take place in history and as cultural productions, they are inextricably connected to the material, historical and cultural contexts from which they emerge and to which they speak. Productions mean differently in different geographical, architectural, historical and cultural contexts. They change meaning as the world in and through which they are produced changes (Knowles, 202). Even a sceptical early reviewer of *Godot* after its Criterion transfer exhibits a strong sense of the cultural politics of individual theatres when he suggests that his discomfort with the play might stem from its transfer from its original home in the Arts Theatre to the Criterion's "charming compact bandbox [...] designed for the frivols of life," where it displaced a year's run of an "intimate revue."⁴ This response, which pays attention to the politics of location, theatrical space and programming, even between two geographically-close London

3 Nottingham Playhouse Archive, Nottinghamshire County Council 1957–1958 cuttings book DDNP 2/4/1/7. Subsequent NP archive references in text.

4 Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading, STAGE FILE/ENA-1955/2 UoR MS 1572. This cutting has no author name, date or newspaper.

theatres, epitomises how British *Godots* first emerged from what was, at the end of the 1940s—viewed by an Arts Council increasingly concerned with national pride and self-advertisement—seen as the ‘cloistered intellectualism’ of the club theatre into the commercial West End, and then out into a regional tour and subsequent licensing to regional repertory theatres.

This essay traces the archival remains of some *Godot* productions—most but not all of them English—outside of London in the time between the first Peter Hall production and the early 1970s. The picture of regional English productions of *Godot* sketched here makes no pretence to completeness even within its limiting dates, and is necessarily provisional and fragmentary, shaped by exclusions and inclusions and the necessary limitations of the archive which, after all, documents performances which are, by their nature, lost. It presents only tendencies and a few suggestive fragments of the early performance history of *Waiting for Godot* beyond the London stage, necessarily partial accounts of the meanings produced by *Godot* for its audiences in the English provinces. If at times it registers the minutiae of the archival remains—the numbers of root vegetables required per performance in the Birmingham Studio’s stage manager’s prop notes, the takings on ice cream and programmes at Century Mobile Theatre’s touring *Godot* on its Keswick stop in 1967—then one can instance Beckett’s own preference for the ‘demented particulars’ rather than grand synthesis, as is made clear in an entry in his “German Diaries” made in 1937. He writes, “[w]hat I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births and deaths, because that is all I can know [...]. [T]he pure incoherence of times and men and places is at least amusing” (qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 244). As such, however, the archival flotsam probed by this essay invites consideration of some hitherto neglected aspects of Beckett’s early reception in regional theatre which, at the very least, complicate a received story about the canonisation of *Godot*. Performance never exists in ‘ideal’ forms, and, as Baz Kershaw argues, location is key to assessing “the political impact of theatre” (1996, 133).

Between 1955 and the early 1970s, Beckett’s play was a significant presence in provincial repertory theatres, and among touring theatre groups and amateur festivals. One is so used to an oppositional account of the genesis of the play in production in London and Paris that it is almost disconcerting to encounter archival evidence of the play’s early popular critical and commercial success in the regions in the wake of its West End run, despite declining repertory audiences and its formidable aura of ‘difficulty.’ It was regularly produced by the most prestigious regional reps, and there were some notable critical and commercial successes. Nor was this entirely a matter of mere novelty. A Sheffield Playhouse production in May 1967 was a conspicuous box office success, leading to the play being revived the same November, a *South Yorkshire*

Times article noting that “more people came to see the production in the week than in any other first week of a play here in recent years. ‘By public demand’ can rarely have been a more appropriate slogan” (“Return of *Godot* to Playhouse,” np). In 1969, Hall Green Little Theatre in Birmingham staged *Godot* in June as part of a summer season, despite the fact that the play was also in the Birmingham Rep’s main season the previous month (“Difficult,” np). When Ronald Bryden, reviewing the Royal Court revival in 1965, insisted that Beckett “like Freud in Auden’s elegy, has become a climate of opinion,” he was not speaking about the metropolitan climate alone (50).

Some archival trace remains of a large number of these regional *Godots*.⁵ The number of productions, amateur and professional, grows steadily throughout the 1960s, an annual trickle in the early years of the decade growing into fifteen separate productions of *Godot* in 1969—from those of major repertoires like the Birmingham Repertory to the amateur Argosy production which won the 1969 Hillingdon Drama Festival—thereafter beginning to decline somewhat in the early 1970s (in part, belatedly, as Beckett’s subsequent plays begin to steal some of *Godot*’s cultural thunder and more productions of *Endgame*, *Happy Days* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* were mounted, particularly by the newer ‘alternative repertory’ companies). After the London premiere in 1955, the first contact between the play and the non-metropolitan arena was that Criterion production, which toured suburban London and regional theatres with the original cast immediately after its West End run. Far from being a beleaguered, brave and potentially financially ruinous punt on the metropolitan avant-garde—the familiar choice of cultural capital over box office—correspondence in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre archive between John Henderson, director of the Birmingham Rep, and Michael Wide of Scott and Wide indicates that the regional theatres who hosted the first touring *Godot* were taking a calculated bet on the play’s successful eight-month run translating into profit outside the West End. Performance history seldom views a play such as *Godot* in terms of financial, rather than cultural, profit, but in fact a central strand in the traces of provincial *Godots* in the archive registers the play as a theatrical property, available for licence, subject to casting and publicity, a calculated element within a season’s programming.

In a series of letters from mid-May 1956, Henderson and Wide negotiate a contract that gives the Criterion cast and producers a guaranteed £525 a week for the projected two-week Birmingham Rep run (during midsummer

⁵ The Staging Beckett database is currently documenting professional Beckett productions in Britain and Ireland. See <http://www.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/>. Accessed 19/10/2015.

when the Birmingham Rep company was itself away and visiting productions were scheduled), rather than the first £525 of putative box office receipts a more cautious Henderson initially offered. Even allowing for a certain amount of theatre-business braggadocio, there is a clear sense on the part of Scott and Wide of the financial value of their controversial property; in a letter of May 12th 1956, Wide writes "I should think that any form of disaster is highly unlikely at the box office, wouldn't you? We open at Harrow Coliseum a week on Monday and I understand from the manager that the populace is fairly storming around the box office."⁶

Already, very shortly after the West End run, *Godot* is both, somewhat unfamiliarly, a potentially viable financial property, and subject to a well-oiled publicity machine turning London controversy into regional box office. The programmes for the touring Criterion *Godot*, supplied by Scott and Wide, had the standard covers of the original run, with a stylised pair of behatted tramps surrounded by newspapers, tin cans and fishbones, sitting at the foot of a cruciform signpost, with space for inserting the venue and dates for individual parts of the tour: "All the small printing is pictorial [...] and Houston Rogers pictures of the Criterion production" (BRT MS 978 2/3/107). "AT LAST YOU CAN STOP—WAITING FOR GODOT" says the publicity flyer for the tour, constructing both an audience horizon of expectation and an extant familiarity with the play's central situation.

Of course, the touring Criterion *Godot* is a (first) metropolitan production touring the regions, rather than itself a regional production. The reason for the gap in the Birmingham Rep's programming which allowed the fortnight of *Godot* is in itself significant as both an insight into the ambition and scale of the more prestigious subsidised repertory companies, "determinedly non-commercial in approach, based in and serving a specific community or region and providing a wide range of plays, new and classic, challenging and popular" (Rowell and Jackson, 2), and into contemporary Arts Council ambitions to reverse the flood of continental European drama dominating British theatre by a campaign for national renewal which advocated what *Plays and Players* called in 1955 a "theatrical export drive" to showcase British drama abroad (5). The resident producer Douglas Seale's production of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, which had had a four-week run at the theatre in June 1956, was then taken by the resident company to the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt in Paris

6 Letter from Wide and Scott to Henderson, 12 May 1956, MS 978 2/3/107 Birmingham Repertory Theatre archive, Birmingham Central Library. Subsequent BRT references in text.

as part of the International Festival of Drama.⁷ It was well-received; the only politely damning review of the Shaw play came from Harold Hobson, who would remark in it that he had enjoyed his visit to Paris simply because he was able to see *En attendant Godot* again (qtd. in Trewin, 164–165).

Scott and Wide's sunny optimism about the Criterion *Godot* doing good box-office at Birmingham Rep must thus be seen within the context of British theatrical Europhilia and the specific popularity of French theatre (Genet, Anouilh, Giraudoux, Sartre, Ionesco, Cocteau and others) on the British stage, and, conversely, against the associated anxieties about British stages being dominated from abroad which sponsored British Council-funded 'exports' to international drama festivals. That the Birmingham Rep company would then return to Birmingham to rehearse Molière's *The Miser*, which was to be televised from the BBC's Midlands studios on the 19th of July and to tour *Caesar and Cleopatra* to the Old Vic, adds another contemporary frame (Trewin, 164–165). The Criterion *Godot* sits amidst Birmingham Rep's extensive 1956 metropolitan and international commitments at a time of intense anxiety about imported and exported drama, when post-imperial decline and a fractured national identity fed a British Council-funded project aimed at recuperating the state's cultural capital by sending British plays to European drama festivals. (On a more obviously post-imperial scale was the Nottingham Playhouse's 1962 *Macbeth*, which was about to embark on a West African tour shortly after it played immediately after a week's run of *Godot*.)⁸ Suggestively, the Criterion *Godot* at Birmingham Rep was also staged at a moment when, while prestigious repertoires were feeding it material, television was beginning to inflict a considerable blow on theatre audiences. However, perhaps the most salient aspect of that Criterion touring *Godot* is that, as a summer tour, it was not programmed as part of the design of a repertory season. This was something that would alter when regional reps began to produce the play themselves within the next year, and the high modernist artefact was inserted as a theatrical property into the containing ethos of the repertory system, at a time when, crucially, it was already on the decline.

To consider the production history of early *Godots* outside of London is necessarily to consider the history of a specific period in the history of British repertory theatre. Repertory survived and even flourished in the austere siege conditions of World War II, expanding in the decade 1945–1955, only to fall

⁷ The company's governing director Barry Jackson had also been asked to take *Caesar and Cleopatra* to St Malo and the Festival Biennale at Venice but declined.

⁸ The tour was to include Nigeria, Ghana and Sierre Leone, with *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night* and *Arms and the Man*.

victim to the television set and home entertainment provided by the BBC and, from 1955, by commercial television. 'Commercial' repertory sustained a mortal blow—and the low-grade, twice a night 'weekly rep' of impresarios such as Harry Hanson and John Fortescue was soon killed off almost entirely—but the local brand, increasingly at the new civic theatres, was saved by increasing blood transfusions from Arts Council and local government sources, as is amply testified in *Godot* theatrical ephemera (Rowell and Jackson, 87). Despite this, the *Stage Year Books* tell their own story; by 1950, the number of theatres with permanent repertory companies was 94. By 1954, that figure was down to 60, and the following year 55. By 1956, as Rowell and Jackson note, the *Year Book* was reduced to whistling in the dark: "Fortunes may be low at the moment, but like Old Soldiers the Repertory Theatre never dies" (qtd. in Rowell and Jackson, 87). A certain hunger for new plays to shore up the decline is suggested by the speed with which *Godot*, like *Look Back in Anger*, was seized upon and produced by dozens of theatres up and down the country as soon as it was licensed for repertory. Both plays were seen by influential London reviewers as revolutionary texts overthrowing a stale, anachronistic theatrical status, yet as *Godot* filtered out into rep and the regions, it is hard not to see that such revolutionary potential for a complete reinvention of theatrical forms noted by London reviewers (though only partly realised on the London and Paris stages, in any case) was muted, and not only by familiarity, but by the containment and institutionalisation inherent in the changing repertory system as it competed for audiences and became increasingly reliant on state subsidies.

In the years immediately after the play's West End run, *Godot* ironically figured within repertory programming as the very traditional type of a successful West End transfer trailing its metropolitan glamour. Nottingham Playhouse press cuttings for the summer 1957 season in which it first produced *Godot* stress their new plays' freshness and metropolitan credentials, advance publicity noting for instance that the Playhouse is "among the first theatres outside London" to stage Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet* (NP DDNP 2/4). *Godot* in rep, far from sweeping away a theatrical status quo, would continue to rub shoulders with comic and verse plays, Victorian melodrama, social realism, European classics in translation, Shakespeare, Restoration comedy and the Christmas pantomime. Typically, repertories tried to appeal to a wide audience, offering two or three classic or modern classic plays (often Shaw or Arthur Miller, sometimes Shakespeare if a play was on school exam syllabi); two or three modern comedies or thrillers (Priestly, Rattigan, Coward, Ayckbourn, Christie); one or two recently released plays from the West End once their drawing power had been proved in London; a family play or pan-

tomime at Christmas (Rowell and Jackson, 123). The Nottingham Playhouse's next *Godot* in November 1962 was succeeded by a new comedy, *The Keep* by Gwyn Thomas, which had transferred successfully from the Royal Court to the West End, then a *Macbeth* by the Playhouse's West African touring company, then the Christmas show, the musical *Salad Days* (NP DD NP 2/4/1/13). Century Mobile Theatre, a touring company which had a temporary base at the Duke's Playhouse in Lancaster, programmed *Godot* (billed as "a modern classic") in its 1972 spring season along with *Twelfth Night*, *Arsenic and Old Lace* (a "comedy-thriller"), *The Beggars' Opera* ("a bawdy, rollicking period musical") and *Romeo and Juliet* ("the world's best love story").⁹ Most repertory theatres could simply not afford to produce significant amounts of experimental work unless it was also sensational or had sufficiently broad popular appeal to draw crowds in an increasingly competitive theatrical marketplace—and that *Godot*, despite its aura of 'difficulty' could do both, was cheap to stage, and came with proven West End marketability, in some sense explains its relative popularity as a programming choice, as it moved from 'new play' to 'modern classic' status.

Many of the traces left in the archive by these early *Godots* are theatrical ephemera, particularly programmes, whose function as a means of framing the performance and as consumer memorabilia clearly struck Beckett very early in his engagement with the theatre, when in 1952, he satirised in his introduction to a radio *Godot* the audience's quest for "a broader, loftier meaning to carry away from the performance, along with the programme and the Eskimo pie" (qtd. in Knowlson 2006, 126). Reading the programmes, and, to a lesser extent, the press-cuttings of productions of *Godot* show the play as an economic product, part of a highly localised financial theatrical economy, generating revenue, requiring advertising, pulling in (or not) paying audiences. An adjacent cutting from the *Nottingham Evening Post* in the Nottingham Playhouse cuttings book makes reference to the contemporaneous abolition of the Entertainment Tax amidst coverage of the 1957 *Godot* (NP DDNP 2/4/1/7). Later on, as programmes expanded away from the minimal early 1950s sixpenny model, critical musings and contextual material would begin to vie for space with biographies of the cast and crew as a way of framing and representing the performance, but when the first repertory *Godots* were produced—with actors, directors and often set designers entirely familiar to their weekly or fortnightly audience, therefore

9 Century Mobile Theatre programme for spring 1972 season at the Duke's Theatre, Lancaster, Century Theatre Archive. DE 5067. Record Office for Leicestershire and Rutland. Subsequent CMT references in text.

needing no introduction—such programmes consisted largely of advertisements for local businesses, placing the performance in an intensely familiar local commercial and institutional context.

Local newspaper reviews of the 1957 Nottingham Playhouse *Godot* were urbane, generally appreciative, but, typically, focused less on the play (other than a brief nod to its supposed universalism) than on admiration for the performances of Kendrick Owen, John Southworth, Emrys James and David Phethean, familiar repertory actors seen weekly at the Playhouse in different roles, and this *Godot*'s significance as the final production by the departing artistic director, John Harrison (NP DDNP 2/4/1/7). Within repertory, audiences were of course culturally positioned and conditioned by the framework of the familiar theatre to which many paid weekly or fortnightly visits; Rowell and Jackson argue for a difference in audience responses to repertory, that "audiences found in playgoing a social and gregarious rather than artistic satisfaction. A shared evening with familiar performers and fellow spectators constituted the basis of their theatrical pleasure" (85). This is evident in the way in which the 1957 *Godot* is framed in the composite archival texts constituted by the interleaving of local press-cuttings, reviews and programmes.

The surviving ephemera of the Nottingham Playhouse 1957 and 1962 *Godots* tell us much about the theatrical cultures among which *Godot* was beginning to take root. Like many such regional repertory companies, the Nottingham Playhouse was run by a trust whose trustees included representatives of Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council, but which was also funded by the Arts Council, something which, along with the history of the theatre building, is featured prominently in the programme design. Formed in 1948 to take over the running of the old Playhouse in Goldsmith Street, a converted cinema with a small stage and a seating capacity of 467, by 1963 the reputation of the theatre had so grown that a new, larger playhouse was built. The Nottingham Playhouse's first *Godot* was the final choice of play by the dissatisfied departing artistic director John Harrison in July 1957, an avant-garde note in a summer season dominated by Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet*, J. Lee Thompson's *Murder Without Crime* and Noel Coward's *South Sea Bubble* (NP DDNP 2/4/1/1). The choice of play was perceived by the local press as an attempt to improve its recent falling attendances (down to 40%) and a 'broad-side' by the Playhouse against the city's other (commercial) repertory company, Harry Hanson's Court Players at the Theatre Royal, but it was also in some sense a political choice, as Harrison's departure, along with that of the theatre's manager John Sneath, was due to artistic disagreements with the Playhouse board. As local press coverage noted, *Godot* did not arrive, but Hugh Williatt, vice-chair of the Nottingham Theatre Trust appeared on stage to acknowledge

Harrison's work, and the *Nottingham Evening Post* featured a photograph of a somewhat harassed Harrison between John Southworth and Kendrick Owen in costume as the tramps. The first Nottingham Playhouse *Godot* speaks less of an inviolate space of modernist art than of the local and specific terms of its production, and the surveillance of theatre by what Dan Rebellato aptly terms the regional repertoires' increasingly Foucauldian 'docile' bodies, subjected to an increasing panoptical system of metropolitan management and surveillance "in very minute detail indeed. Every one of its associated organisations, large or small, submits its budgets, balance-sheets and trading returns to the Council, and is called upon to justify its figures and forecasts" (qtd. in Rebellato, 49). Further, the programme's advertising for local businesses lays bare the far less overt social control that functions hegemonically within most systems of public funding, which generally provides on a percentage of the revenues for a given production or season but which nonetheless usually require that the budgets of their beneficiary theatres be administered through the supervision of volunteer community boards of directors. Programme notes in the 1962 Nottingham Playhouse *Godot* prominently credit the Arts Council of Great Britain above the play's title, a forthcoming lecture on "New Theatres" by Tyrone Guthrie, and a note advertising the fact that the Arts Council's 17th annual report is on sale in the Playhouse lobby. Audiences making their way to see these early *Godots* walked past the evidence of the surveyed and docile bodies of the regional repertory.

A certain bifurcation takes place throughout the regional *Godots* of the 1960s between theatre conceived of as diversionary entertainment or, on the other hand, an opportunity for social critique. Increasing in number throughout the 1960s, there were frequent productions by amateur companies, such as the Masquers' Dramatic Society (Great Yarmouth, April 1968), the Sheffield Playgoers' Society (1967–1968), the Arts Centre Theatre (York, March 1968). A further notable amateur subgroup was composed of student companies attached to universities, such as the Liverpool University Dramatic Society in 1960, the ADC in Cambridge, Birmingham University Guild Theatre Group (both 1967), the Cardiff University College Players (1968) whose production (with a female director, Boy and Lucky) was banned from an Istanbul International Student Drama festival for fear "the play—or the young cast—might aggravate a tense student situation in the country" (UoR STAGE FILE ENA-1968/11). Earlier reviews had praised or excoriated action, direction, or the play itself, but generally noticed no contemporary relevance or political point; a 1968 review in the *Yarmouth Mercury* viewing *Godot* as a "criticism of a society based on inequality and wealth" was unusual, and perhaps symptomatic of the greater freedoms enjoyed by amateur productions to whom the play was polit-

ically appealing as well as cheap to mount (UoR STAGE FILE/ENA-1968/12). A growing dissatisfaction with the compromises of publicly-funded theatre, subject as it was to the new largesse in state and local authority provision, and with its critical function progressively whittled away by the institutionalisation of the civic repertory theatre, saw new 'alternative' venues and groups stage *Godot*. Repertory theatres created their own small 'alternative' spaces, like Birmingham Rep's small Studio, which staged *Godot* in 1974, a production surrounded, like others of its type after the late 1960s, with discussion groups, special late-night performances aimed at young people, and troupes of actor-teachers working in schools. Spotlight Theatre Company, Norwich, is typical of another tendency, touring their *Godot* to village halls, schools youth clubs and churches with the specific intent of provoking discussion in open sessions, such performances far outnumbering those given at the theatre. *Godot* was increasingly performed alongside other works; Zeb Youth Group performed an extract along with an extract from David Halliwell's *Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs*, and Bob Dylan's "Oxford Town," ending with "sound effects of sirens and bombing raids coupled with a searchlight turned on the audience" (UoR STAGE FILE/ENA-1969/9).

Some of this freeing of the play comes from a movement away from the constraints of Victorian rococo plush or newer 'civic pride' theatre architecture. *Godot* was, for instance, a central part of the repertoire for Century Mobile Theatre, a co-operative touring repertory founded in 1948 which toured the midlands and later the northwest on four ex-military lorries which unfolded into a 250-seater theatre to be erected on—with a dismaying reminder of the depredations of war—"recreation grounds, public parks, fairgrounds, village squares, bombed sites" (CMT T401/DE5068). Reviews of the non-proscenium Christmas production at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in December 1967 focus uncomfortably on the proximity of the actors in the small space, and the alarmed responses of other audience members seen in traverse across the playing space: "we wait with Vladimir and Estragon, instead of just watching them wait from some lofty perch in the upper circle" (Lambe, np). Other reviews, both hostile and appreciative, register the local accents and mannerisms adopted by the cast, and the dead Christmas tree as the set, which indicate a site-specific shift or enlargement of meaning, a heightened awareness of the homeless people on the Edinburgh streets, as the result of deliberate emphases that take their cue from the incidentals of venue and locality. The years that have passed since the play was new are registered not in terms of a weary or amused familiarity but in terms of an alarmed recognition of the play's greater political relevance: "Eleven years ago nihilism shocked. Now it concerns us all. We are, some of us, afraid it may be true" (Lambe, np).

If a theatrical revolution had been effected by *Godot*, as indicated by eminent reviewers of the Arts Theatre premiere, such disruptive potential was quickly—if temporarily—domesticated in the regions by the play's containment within the repertory system and the discourses produced by the quasi-nationalisation of theatre in the following years. The meanings produced by early regional productions of *Godot* for their audiences, as constructed by the frame of repertory seasons, the social experience of repertory audiences, a familiar stock company, publicity, programmes and the discourses of subsidised civic theatre, thus differed considerably to those of the initial London run. Without denying the validity of theatre histories which privilege considerations of the play as era-defining theatrical event, or as purely aesthetic object, this essay has attempted to complicate *Godot*-as-event with considerations of the play in terms of a multiplicity of changing discourses, social and cultural as well as theatrical.

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